

Message Text

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47

ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 PM-07 EB-11 SP-03 INR-10 CIAE-00

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FM USINT DAMASCUS

TO AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 424

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0511

FOR SECRETARY'S PARTY (SISCO AND ATHERTON)

BEIRUT FOR DWOR

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, SY, US

SUBJECT: SALE OF C-130'S TO SYRIA

REF: STATE 87841

1. SUMMARY: SYRIAN ARAB AIRLINES HAVE INFORMALLY APPROACHED LOCKHEED REPRESENTATIVE LOMBARD SEEKING A REPLY FROM THE USG RE THE POSSIBLE PURCHASE OF FOUR C-130S BY THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT. THE HEAD OF THE SYRIAN ARAB AIRLINES INFORMED LOMBARD THAT SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM INTENDS TO RAISE THIS SUBJECT WITH SECRETARY KISSINGER DURING HIS FORTHCOMING VISIT TO DAMASCUS DEPENDING, OF COURSE, ON THE ATMOSPHERE OF SECRETARY'S TALKS WITH PRESIDENT ASAD." END SUMMARY.

2. ON AFTERNOON OF APRIL 30 GEORGE LOMBARD, LOCKHEED REPRESENTATIVE, BRIEFED ME AND FSO GNEHM ABOUT HIS MEETING EARLIER SAME AFTERNOON WITH GENERAL MOKAYED, HEAD OF THE SYRIAN ARAB AIRLINES.

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3. ACCORDING TO LOMBARD, GENERAL MOKAYED INQUIRED ABOUT

THE POSSIBILITY OF THE PURCHASE FROM LOCKHEED OF FOUR C-130S TO BE OBTAINED "AS SOON AS POSSIBLE." WHEN MR. LOMBARD POINTED OUT THAT LOCKHEED'S CURRENT PRODUCTION LINE IS COMMITTED UNTIL MID-1976, GENERAL MOKAYED WONDERED IF THE U.S. DEFENSE DEPARTMENT WOULD BE WILLING TO DEFER ITS ORDERS IN LIGHT OF THE WINDING DOWN OF THE VIETNAM WAR SO AS TO ENABLE THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT TO MAKE ITS PURCHASES QUICKLY.

4. GENERAL MOKAYED TOLD LOMBARD THAT SYRIA IS INFORMALLY APPROACHING LOCKHEED FIRST IN ORDER TO ASCERTAIN WHETHER OR NOT THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT WOULD PERMIT THIS SALE. THIS IS BEING DONE IN ORDER TO AVOID ANY POSSIBLE EMBARRASMENT TO SYRIA SHOULD THE ANSWER BE IN THE NEGATIVE. GENERAL MOKAYED STRESSED THAT THE C-130 IS NOT A "BELLIGERENT AIRCRAFT" AND NOTED THAT IT HAS BEEN SOLD TO SUCH ARAB COUNTRIES AS LIBYA, JORDAN, SAUDI ARABIA AND KUWAIT. HE SAW NO REASON WHY SYRIA SHOULD ALSO NOT BE ALLOWED TO PURCHASE IT POINTING OUT THAT SYRIA HAS USED THE AIRCRAFT IN THE PAST ON A LOAN BASIS FROM SAUDI ARABIA. IN THIS REGARD HE ALSO ALLUDED TO THE POSSIBILITY OF HAVING SAUDI ARABIA PURCHASE THE AIRCRAFT FOR SYRIA SHOULD THE USG ANSWER BE "NO" TO A DIRECT PURCHASE.

5. GENERAL MOKAYED ALSO INDICATED THAT THERE IS STRONG PRESSURE FROM WITHIN THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT TO PURCHASE THE RUSSIAN OR FRENCH EQUIVALENT OF THE C-130 BUT THAT THE SYRIAN EXPERTS REALIZE THAT THE AMERICAN AIRCRAFT IS FAR BETTER. MOREOVER THE SYRIAN EXPERTS ARE ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT THE SUPPLY OF SPARE PARTS IN THE FUTURE.

6. GENERAL MOKAYED STATED THAT FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM INTENDS TO RAISE THE SUBJECT WITH SECRETARY KISSINGER DURING HIS FORTHCOMING TRIP TO DAMASCUS DEPENDING, OF COURSE, UPON "THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE SECRETARY'S TALKS WITH THE PRESIDENT." AT LOMBARD'S REQUEST, MOKAYED PROVIDED HIM WITH A LETTER SPELLING OUT SYRIA'S REQUIREMENTS.

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7. CIVIL AIR ATTACHE DWOR WILL BE REPORTING SEPARATELY IN DETAIL ON THE RESULTS OF LOMBARD'S MEETING WITH GENERAL MOKAYED.

8. COMMENT: I REALIZE THAT THERE ARE MANY ELEMENTS INVOLVED IN CONSIDERING THIS SALE NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH IS THE ABSENCE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN SYRIA AND

THE UNITED STATES. AT THE SAME TIME, HOWEVER, IT WOULD
SEEM TO ME THAT SUCH A SALE, WHICH WOULD INVOLVE
ROUGHLY SOMEWHERE BETWEEN \$40 AND \$45 MILLION,
WOULD BE AN IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT IN OUR RELATIONS WITH
SYRIA BOTH FROM AN ECONOMIC AS WELL AS A POLITICAL
POINT OF VIEW, PARTICULARLY AT THIS TIME.

9. MEANWHILE, I CANNOT COMMENT ON THE MILITARY ASPECTS
OF THIS SALE YET IT IS QUITE OBVIOUS THAT THE SYRIANS
WANT THE C-130'S VERY BADLY. CYNICALLY SPEAKING, IT MAY
BE THAT ASAD IS LOOKING AHEAD TO A RETURN TO
"NORMALITY" IN SYRIA WHEN THE REGIME MAY WELL BE REQUIRED
TO MOVE ELITE TROOPS QUICKLY THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY IN
ORDER TO OFFSET POSSIBLE COUP ATTEMPTS. BE THAT AS IT
MAY, I DO NOT SEE THAT THE PURCHASE OF THESE PLANES BY
SYRIA WOULD MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE IN THE SYRIAN/ISRAELI
MILITARY EQUATION, BUT I MAY BE WRONG. IN ANY EVENT, I
WOULD HOPE THAT WE COULD BE IN A POSITION AT LEAST AT
THIS STAGE OF THE GAME TO GIVE THE SYRIANS AN AFFIRMATIVE
ANSWER IN PRINCIPLE WHILE MAKING IT CLEAR TO THEM THAT
A FINAL DECISION WOULD DEPEND ON AN OVERALL EVALUATION OF
THE MILITARY, DIPLOMATIC AND PRODUCTION FACTORS
INVOLVED.

SCOTES

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